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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 000175

SIPDIS

LONDON FOR POL/ERIEDEL

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: GOVERNMENT AND MAOISTS DECLARE CEASE-FIRE,
NEGOTIATIONS EXPECTED SOON

REF: A. A. KATHMANDU 154

[B. B. KATHMANDU 169](#)

[C. C. KATHMANDU 137](#)

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski for reasons 1.5 (b) and
(d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) On January 29, the Maoists followed by the Government of Nepal (GoN) announced a cease-fire. The GoN (see paragraph 13), in return, agreed to drop the terrorist designation placed on the Maoists. In their statement (see paragraph 12), the Maoists reiterated their demands for a round table conference, interim government, and a constitutional assembly. Dates and venue for impending negotiations have not yet been established. The political parties are cautiously optimistic but are still establishing strategies in the wake of the announcement. How the ceasefire may affect security forces operations and the general strike previously announced by the Maoists for February 13-14 remains unclear. End Summary.

Cease-fire Announced

[1](#)2. (U) At 18:00 on January 29, the Maoists issued a press release declaring a cease-fire (Ref B). The Government of Nepal (GoN) followed with its own announcement a few hours subsequently. The Maoist press statement (Paragraph 12) states that the GoN had met the minimum conditions for talks--removal of the terrorist designation, withdrawal of the INTERPOL warrants, removal of bounties on the Maoist leadership, and declaration of a cease-fire--but did not identify commitments the Maoists made to the government. The release also called upon the party's membership to work in accordance with the declared cease-fire and mobilize in support of its minimum demands: a round table conference, an interim government, and a constitutional assembly.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Neither the GoN or the Maoists have agreed to a date or venue for negotiations. According to press sources, the Maoists have formed a three member negotiating team, including top ideologue Baburam Bhattarai, Krishna Bahadur Mahara (who had headed the Maoists' previous negotiating team), and Dev Gurung. The GoN's press release designates Minister for Works and Physical Planning Narayan Singh Pun to serve as the GoN's coordinator for negotiations. According to Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare Anuradha Koirala, there is no decision on who will lead the delegation or its members.

Getting the Parties Onboard

[1](#)4. (SBU) From press reports and Embassy contacts, it appears that only the National Democratic Party (RPP) leadership was consulted prior to the announced cease-fire. The local press reported that the King held a meeting with RPP leader Surya Bahadur Thapa on January 28 to discuss peace talks and conditions. (Comment: As Prime Minister Chand is a member of the RPP, it is likely that Thapa was aware of the developments. It is also unlikely the King felt it necessary to call a separate meeting with the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, as Deputy Prime Minister Mandal is its leader. End Comment.) The local press also reported that both Girija Prasad Koirala, President of the Nepali Congress Party (NC), and Mahdavi Kumar Nepal, General Secretary of the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist Leninist (UML), declined to meet with the King on January 29. We have been unable to verify this report (Ref C).

Party Perspectives

[1](#)5. (SBU) Nepali Congress (NC): Narhari Acharya of the NC, a member of the GoN's previous negotiating team, told the

Embassy that while the cease-fire is a positive step and a dramatic shift for the Cabinet, but noted it was done without consulting the Party. The lack of transparency on the terms and conditions are problematic. As a former negotiator, Acharya feels the terms and conditions should be made public so failure can be appropriately assigned.

16. (U) Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist Leninist (UML): According to the Party's headquarters, the UML was not consulted prior to the cease-fire announcement. Despite this drawback, the UML hopes the negotiations will be successful. In a January 29 statement at the UML's General Convention, now being held in Janakpur, UML Leader Nepal stated, "...we do not rule out the possibility of constituent assembly as an alternative to resolve the current crisis dogging the nation." Support for a constituent assembly is a reversal of previous party positions, which called for establishing an all-party government under Article 128 of the Constitution.

17. (SBU) Nepal Peasants and Workers Party (NPWP): Least optimistic of all the major party spokesmen, the NPWP President Narayan Man Bijuchhe predicts that the talks will bog down and fail. Further, he believes that the call for talks is a ruse by the Maoists and/or the government to stage for future attacks. Should the talks be successful and a constituent assembly be held, he stated that the Maoists can be expected to serve the Indian agenda as a means of thanking them for providing years of safehaven.

18. (SBU) People's Front Nepal (PFN): Amik Sherchan, President of the PFN, took the cease-fire announcement positively, as it has opened the door for talks. However, he too went on to complain that the government did not consult the political parties regarding this matter. It is his belief that the opportunity for a peaceful resolution to the conflict may be squandered if the government continues to sideline the political parties. Serchan stressed that it would take some time for the Maoists to accept a constitutional monarchy. He raised further concerns about Narayan Singh Pun's credentials as the government's coordinator; he believes it will only be a matter of time before Pun is named the delegation's head.

Unknown Implications

19. (SBU) The GoN is evaluating the full implications of a cease-fire. Comments to PolOff by MG Katwal, Co-coordinator of the National Security Secretariat, indicate his desire to continue security force patrols and presence in the field. He confided, however, that a code of conduct has not yet been established. MG Katwal could also not determine if the cease-fire will mean a withdrawal of the Maoists' February 13 and 14 general strike.

The Palace Extends Its Thanks

10. (C) The Palace's Press Secretary, Mohan Pandey, called to thank the Ambassador for the U.S. Government's support and pressure on the Maoists, which he believes played a significant role in influencing Maoist agreement to the ceasefire.

Comment

11. (C) The political parties' initial comments--cautious optimism laced with criticism--indicate that they may be trying to hedge their bets in the face of uncertain outcomes. The parties, which already fear being marginalized, will likely press for greater "transparency" in dialogue efforts as a way to keep open opportunities to comment on the process without having to take responsibility for its success or failure. The GON realizes the importance of multi-partisan support for this initiative (Refs A and B); failure to get the parties on board will only leave the Maoists a possible "out" to renege on any commitments made through negotiations. Party strategies will become clearer after the release of public statements expected in the next few days. End Comment.

Maoist Press Statement

12. (U) Begin Translation:
It is well understood that our party is always ready for the positive and progressive solution to the present civil war in the country. We have been publicizing our minimum conditions to make an environment for the talks. In this connection, yesterday we were informed about the Government's decision that to start the peace talks the previous government's decision of declaring the Maoists as terrorists has been revoked, the red corner notices issued against the Maoist's

leaders has been withdrawn, the government's decision of fixing price tags on the heads of top Maoist leaders has been withdrawn, and the decision for a cease-fire has been made. This decision of the ruling party is taken positively by our party and through this press release we declare a cease-fire and willingly participate in the peace talks process. Like always, the party appeals to the entire revolutionary warriors of the liberation army, authorities of the people's power, and the general public to work according to the declaration. The party also appeals for the continuation of the organizational and peaceful mobilization to move forward in favor of general policy of the party and minimum working plan--round table conference, interim government, and constitutional assembly.

Date: 29 Jan 2003

Prachanda

Central Committee

NCP (Maoist)

End Translation.

Government Press Statement

13. (U) Begin Translation:

A) His Majesty's Government has the policy to resolve the Maoist problem through talks, and the CPN (Maoist) has also taken initiative in this regard, and since both the sides have reached an understanding for a cease-fire, the earlier decision of labeling the CPN (Maoists) as terrorists, red corner notice to arrest them, and cash rewards to anyone informing or helping in arresting the Maoist leaders, as called by some quarters as "prices on their heads" have been scrapped.

B) To create an atmosphere for the political solution of the problem, Mr. Narayan Singh Pun has been designated as the coordinator.

Cabinet Secretariat

January 29, 2003

End Translation.

MALINOWSKI